

BANDIT BOOKS

TONY AND THE SECRET MONEY

TONY and his friend Sash had been helping old Mr Betts to decorate his house. And it was while they were preparing the last two rooms that they found the money. There were hundreds of pound notes stuck behind the wallpaper.

There were other people interested in it too. Biff and his friends could always use some, and the police are *always* interested in tracing stolen banknotes.

The new Tony book finds Robert Martin in top form.

Other titles in this series

TONY AND THE CHAMP

by ROBERT MARTIN

SANDY SMITH

by WINIFRED MANTLE

THE FIRE SERPENT MYSTERY

by KENNETH MOON

THE SHIP THAT CAME HOME

by FRANK KNIGHT

THE CAMP IN THE HILLS

by SHOWELL STYLES

AL: No 21

COMPUTRIZED

Tony and the Secret Money

ROBERT MARTIN

Illustrated by
EDWARD PAGRAM



ERNEST BENN LIMITED
LONDON

223

1323



CONTENTS

<i>Chapter</i>		<i>Page</i>
1	A time to go	7
2	The experts	15
3	Warnings	28
4	Gobbo strikes	41
5	Right or wrong?	55
6	Burglars	65
7	Hide-out attack	81
8	The build-up	93
9	Not as planned	102
10	Where there's a will	115

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

They blocked the alley.	<i>page</i> 11
“Try not to get any paint on the walls.”	17
“Ber-lood, gimme Ber-lood!”	23
“What’s the lad done?”	31
“Well I never!”	45
“Gobbo strikes again!”	51
“Cor, stone the flippin’ crows!”	59
“C’mon,” said Biff. “They ain’t nothing but nothings.”	69
“Didn’t I hear the TV on?”	75
The air was filled with choking dust	85
“Looks like a real packet of lovely lolly!”	99
“I am a police officer,” a bull-like voice roared.	109

CHAPTER I

A TIME TO GO

“MARVELLOUS!” said Sash. “Flippin’ marvellous! How do I get into these tricks? You tell me that. How?”

Tony grinned at his friend, Stanley Ashe, known as Sash.

“It’s your sweet nature.”

Sash scowled. “More like your sweet tongue, you mean! Clever, that’s you. What’s it to me that old Ma Betts snuffed it? Nice old lass. I’m not saying she wasn’t, but I’ve got my own troubles, what with Ma yacking on all the time and. . . .”

“Knock it off!” Tony snapped. “Old Sam Betts is a friend. Friends in trouble need help.”

“Yeah?” Sash sneered. “When I’m in trouble I ain’t got no friends.”

“You’re a liar.”

“You want a punch on the snoot?”

“Yes—any time you like to try it.”

“Patience, I’ve got.” Sash sighed. “I will turn the other cheek. Just call me a liar once more.”

“Okay. You’re a liar.”

TONY AND THE SECRET MONEY

Sash swung a bunched fist. Tony side-stepped and let go a straight left.

"Oof!" Sash gasped and sat on the ground. He blinked up at Tony. "Why?" he asked mournfully.

"How many times have I let you down when you've been in trouble?"

Sash frowned. "None, I guess."

"So you're a liar," said Tony.

"Ah!" Sash brightened. "You mean *that*. I was just talking—like grown-ups. Sort of generating."

"You mean generalising."

Sash climbed to his feet. "Bet you can't even spell it! Flippin' education! Where's it get you? We met old Sam Betts at school when he came to show us how to do magic tricks. You and me got matey with him. Then we find his missus ain't well and poor old Sam has to have treatment for his aches, so we do a spot of shopping for 'em. Then Ma Betts dies and we try to help old Sam straighten his house so's he can rent out some rooms. See what I mean?"

"No."

Sash sighed again. "Flippin' education, see? If we hadn't been at school, we'd never have met old Sam. Now we're lumbered with helping paint and paper his rooms. And all because us nits has to be educated."

A TIME TO GO

Tony laughed. "No one would know."

"Know what?"

"Know that you're educated. Why do you always talk as if you hadn't any brains?"

Sash tapped a finger on his nose and winked.

"I'm saving 'em. When you've worn yours out being all smart and getting landed with other people's troubles, I'll have a whole set—nearly unused. I don't really need mine now, y'see. Not with you and lots of grown-ups all around telling me what to do."

Tony nodded, grinning. "You could be right. There's certainly enough people around telling us what to do." He pointed ahead. "There's the shop. Let's get the ceiling paint before we go home to dinner."

Sash shrugged. "What's it matter? It's a dead loss anyway. Old Sam'll never reach the ceiling. Not with his stiff arms and shoulders, poor old perisher! We'll have to do it. You see if we don't."

"So what! Won't hurt us, will it?" Tony led the way into the shop, followed by the still muttering Sash.

Tony took time choosing the paint, but at last they left the shop.

"The time you took!" Sash grumbled. "You're worse than Ma when she goes shopping—yacking about this and that and being all choosy."

TONY AND THE SECRET MONEY

"Well, I saved old Sam five bob, didn't I?"

"Ur—s'pose so. Let's take the short-cut home, else I'll be late and Ma will start yacking."

They were half-way through the short-cut—an alleyway between two warehouses—and had turned a corner when Sash halted.

"Biff Nelson and some of his gang," he whispered.

"So what?" Tony snapped.

"Not afraid of them, are you?"

Sash glared at the four boys lounging against some packing-cases a few yards ahead.

"Take more than that lot to scare me."

Biff Nelson, tousle-haired and chunky, stepped out to bar their way.

"Well, well, the do-goodie boys!" he sneered. The other boys sniggered. "Paint, they got," said Biff. "Now what would they want with paint, eh?" He flicked his head and his three companions moved alongside him. They blocked the alley.

"Hi, Biff," said Tony pleasantly. He glanced at the other three. "Hi, Joe, Moosh, Colly."

Only Moosh answered. He was thin, nervous-looking.

"Hi, Tony. Wotcher, Sash!"

Joe and Colly stared hard-eyed. Biff leered. None of them moved.

"We're late," said Tony. "No time to stop."

A TIME TO GO



They blocked the alley.

A TIME TO GO

He stepped forward briskly.

Biff reached out, pushed hard. Tony bumped into Joe, who pushed back. Tony stumbled off balance.

Sash rushed forward, paint tin swinging. It hit Biff in the stomach. Biff doubled up and sank to one knee.

"Sorry, chum," said Sash with great pleasure. "Accident."

"Oh yeah!" Colly yelled, and leapt on Sash.

The paint tin dropped and rolled away. Colly was bigger than Sash and the fight grew fierce.

Joe and Moosh closed on Tony. Calmly Tony placed his paint tin on top of a packing-case and advanced to meet menacing fists. He floored Moosh and had Joe retreating under well-aimed blows when suddenly he was pushed and tripped from the back by Biff. Joe and Moosh sat on him.

Sash was holding his own against Colly. But when Biff moved in, Sash was overpowered.

Tony struggled under the weights of Joe and Moosh, then groped for Joe's rear-end and pinched hard. Joe jumped into the air with a mighty "Yeow!"

Tony flung Moosh aside. Moosh rolled close to the squirming figures of Sash, Colly and Biff and got hit in the midriff. Moosh collapsed.

Furious at this attack, Tony grabbed the tin

TONY AND THE SECRET MONEY

of paint which Sash had dropped. The fall had loosened its lid. Tony pulled it off and swung the tin as he yelled:

"Let him up or I'll smother you with this!"

Biff turned, saw the paint tin near his head and surprised Tony by grabbing the handle. The tin swung free.

"Hah!" Biff was triumphant. He aimed the tin to throw its contents over Tony.

Tony ducked and leapt sideways.

At that split second, a large figure appeared around the corner. Biff couldn't stop his throwing action. The paint sloshed out in a fan of white gooey cream. Slosh! Shlump! All over the large figure of Police-Constable True.

"Aw! Flippin' heck!" Biff exclaimed.

Police-Constable True nodded slowly. "That's a fair comment," he said, advancing on Biff.

Sash struggled to his feet. He saw Tony nod and wink a signal. Tony had quietly collected the other tin of paint from the packing-case and hidden it behind his back as he sidled towards the corner.

As Tony sprinted away, Sash said: "Well, good-morning all. Been a nice day!" then bolted after Tony, leaving Biff and his mates facing the paint-plastered policeman.

There's a time to stay and a time to go. Tony and Sash went.

CHAPTER 2

THE EXPERTS

“**B**ULLIES, they are,” said Sam Betts. “It’s worth losing a tin of paint to know you bested ’em. I’ve known that Biff since he was a young ’un. Like his father—a bully. Call him Biff, do you? We used to call his father Basher. Very handy with his fists, was Basher. Leastways, on someone half his size or when he had his gang with him.”

“What happened to Basher?” Tony asked. “I heard he went off to Australia.”

Sam chuckled. “Dartmoor, that’s as near as Basher got to Australia. Went on the run from these parts, then did a robbery with violence down in Plymouth. Got fourteen years. Still has a few years to go before he gets out.”

“I don’t mind a good scrap,” said Sash. “But I don’t go for this gang stuff. Biff had no call to sort us out this morning. It was four against two and no need for it. Proper daft, he is.”

Tony laughed. “Biff’ll have some explaining to do. Old Copper True was fair sloshed with paint!”

TONY AND THE SECRET MONEY

"Hey!" Sash yelled. "You don't think the cops will tag us for it, do you, Tony?"

"Why should they?"

"Well, we were there."

"But we didn't heave the paint over him."

Sash nodded. "S'right. Let Biff do his own explaining."

Sam said: "I'll not forget how you lads are helping me decorate the rooms. It's real noble of you."

"That's us," said Sash. "Noble. We like helping people, and you've had enough trouble. Proper shame, the trouble you've had."

Tony stared disbelievingly at his friend. But Sash's eyes wouldn't meet Tony's gaze.

"Like I always say," Sash continued airily. "A little help is worth a lot of putty."

"Pity," Tony gently corrected.

"Yes—well, y'know what I mean."

"I've cleaned off the ceiling in the front room," said Sam. "Ready to be painted now. D'you think you'll manage by standing on the table?"

"Sure we will," said Tony.

"Try not to get any paint on the walls. That paper is quite good. It's the back room that wants re-papering. Too big a job for us though."

"Strip it," Tony suggested. "Strip it and

THE EXPERTS



"Try not to get any paint on the walls."

THE EXPERTS

paint the walls. That's what Dad did with my bedroom."

"S'right," said Sash importantly. "Ma did our kitchen that way. I helped. Know all about stripping wallpaper, I do."

Tony looked suspiciously at his friend.

"When Sash says he knows all about something it means trouble for someone. Sorry we lost the paint, Sam."

"Not to worry," said Sam, producing a pound note from behind his left ear. "The whole of this is worth spending on another tin, after what happened to Biff."

Sash sighed. "Could you teach me to be a conjurer, Sam? I'd like to have pound notes growing out of my ears."

"When I get the house straight I'll have time to teach you. Though after what happened with Paul I said I'd never teach anyone else."

They had climbed the stairs to the top landing before Tony said:

"Paul was your lodger before your wife died, wasn't he? I met him once when I brought some shopping for you."

Sam nodded. "A strange man. A very strange man. I never liked him, but Betsy did. Paul knew her family before we were married. Years ago, it was. Then Betsy and I met him in Australia when we were touring our conjuring

TONY AND THE SECRET MONEY

act. Then in France, in North Africa and, bless my soul, even in New Zealand! Everywhere we went—there was Paul popping up!”

“And he followed you back to England?” Tony asked.

Sam frowned. “I’ve always wondered about that,” he said. “I gave up travelling abroad, but I still toured around the British Isles as a solo act. Betsy stayed home. Her health wasn’t too good, y’see. But it was about two years before Paul showed up here. I came back from Scotland to find him lodging here.”

“Didn’t Betsy write and tell you?” Sash grinned. “Maybe she didn’t want you to know she had a lodger? Ma had one once. Never told me. When I heard voices at night and got up to see a strange bloke in the kitchen, I bopped him on the noggin’ with the bread board. Well—like I told Ma—a bloke has a right to know who’s staying in his own home!”

“You talk too much,” Tony snapped.

“Yeah, I know,” Sash agreed cheerfully.

“It’s all right, Tony,” said Sam. “I had my bad thoughts about Paul, but they don’t matter now Betsy’s gone.” Sam paused before adding: “But it’s still a mystery to me why he left so suddenly and never came back. Never heard from him since.”

“Did Betsy worry about it?”

THE EXPERTS

"No. I think she knew why Paul left. Never did get around to telling me though."

Tony opened the door of the room Paul had occupied.

"That wallpaper certainly needs stripping," he said. "Funny dark colour, isn't it?"

"Yes. Paul did the decorating himself. Betsy wouldn't rent the room again, even though the money would have helped a lot." Sam sighed. "Ah well! What's done is done and what's passed is past! I'm going to rent these two rooms and that's all there is to it."

Tony closed the door.

"Right! Now for the ceiling!"

It wasn't a very big room and by standing on a table the boys reached the ceiling quite easily. Sam pottered about trying to help, but finally left them and trotted off to the hospital for his regular treatment.

By energetic use of roller and brush, Tony and Sash soon painted all the ceiling except for a small section near the door.

"Just that piece left." Tony surveyed the finished job with pride. "Have to wait for more emulsion paint." He looked at Sash. "Good grief! If we scraped all the paint off you we'd have enough to finish it!"

Sash was well and truly spattered with white paint. Fortunately, both boys had worn old

TONY AND THE SECRET MONEY

overalls, but Sash's head and face were daubed and spattered too.

"Who're you picking on?" Sash retorted. "Take a look at yourself!"

Tony walked across the landing to the bathroom. He took one look in the mirror and yelled with laughter.

"I'm a ghost!" he cried. "All spooky white! We're a pair of ghosts! Who can we haunt?"

"Be your age!" Sash growled. "People don't believe in ghosts nowadays. Let's clean up the floor, then get home. We'll be late for grub."

Sam returned and helped mop up.

"Fine job," he said admiringly. "That ceiling looks as good as new. Thanks, lads, I'll not forget your help."

"That's okay," said Sash airily. "A couple of hundred quid will do!"

Sam chuckled. "And don't think you wouldn't have it if I'd got it to give."

"Getting dark," said Tony. "Come on, Sash. See you tomorrow, Sam!"

They followed the short-cut through the alley. It was gloomy in the evening shadows. Near the corner Sash gripped Tony's arm and drew him close to the wall. The sound of giggling voices came from around the corner. In a few seconds two girls appeared.

THE EXPERTS



"Ber-lood, gimme Ber-lood!"

THE EXPERTS

Sash leapt from the wall, yelling and waving his arms.

"Yoo-hoo-oo!" Sash moaned. "Give me ber-lood to drink! Ber-lood, gimme ber-lood!"

"You dope!" Tony hissed, as one girl began shrieking at the top of her voice.

The other girl appeared to have fallen in a faint.

"Oh lumme!" Sash gasped, and bolted.

Tony held the shrieking girl's hand. "Stop yelling!" he cried close to her ear. "It's only a joke."

"Don't touch me! Don't touch me!" she shrieked. She pulled away and slashed her hand across Tony's face.

"Aw, for Pete's sake!" Tony was disgusted at this exhibition. "Where's your brains?" Then suddenly realising that Sash's silly joke might make trouble for them both, Tony turned and raced around the corner after Sash.

Tony caught Sash in the main street.

"Your face is bleeding." Sash pointed.

Tony mopped his scratched cheek on his sleeve.

"Dunno who was more daft," he said angrily. "Those dippy girls or you."

"It was only a joke. We're only splashed with white paint. Any fool would know we couldn't be ghosts."

TONY AND THE SECRET MONEY

They left the main street and headed homeward.

"Shouldn't have run away," said Tony. "Y'know what girls are—always making trouble."

"Cor, stone the flippin' crows! Don't I just!" Sash declared. "Sisters are bad enough." He chortled gleefully. "Coo, didn't half scare 'em though, didn't we?"

"*You* did."

"Oh yes, it's always me," Sash grumbled. "But you were there so you're in it with me."

"Don't I know it. Hope they calm down before a copper hears the yells," said Tony.

"What's it got to do with a copper?"

"You didn't hear me say how girls always make trouble?"

"Yes I did."

"Well, then. . . ."

Sash halted suddenly. "Oh no! You don't mean they'd sing to the cops about a little bitty joke?"

Tony shrugged. "Might do. They'd have to explain the screaming."

"But the cops will laugh at 'em making all that fuss because a daft bloke like me pretended to be a ghost."

"You don't think they'll tell the truth, do you?" said Tony. "They'll make up a story that'll

THE EXPERTS

sound big—so's they won't look silly. Girls always blame someone else. I learned that at school a long time ago."

"Okay, Grandad, so what do we do?"

"Nothing," said Tony. "Keep quiet. I know that's hard for you," he added with a chuckle.

"But you'd better try."

"What a day!" Sash sighed. "We do a good deed and play a small joke, and all we get is trouble. Life stinks, that's what. Just plain stinks!"

CHAPTER 3

WARNINGS

YOU'RE up, then you're down. Happy, then miserable. Feel free and not worried. Then suddenly you feel trapped and guilty. And for why? You try to explain it, but you can't find the right words. The more you explain, the more silly it all sounds. The more silly it sounds, the more angry you grow at the fuss people are making. So before you know where you are, you're surrounded by trouble.

These are the times when, as Sash said, life stinks.

Tony's mother had died when he was young so Grandma kept house for him and his father since Tony's sister got married. They were happy in their quiet way. Happier than Sash, who lived with his mother and young sister in another flat in the same building. Sash had to be the man of the house. At least, he tried to be. But it wasn't easy for him. Especially when he arrived home to find that the police had called.

"What have you been up to, that's what I want to know?" his mother greeted Sash.

"Nothing."

WARNINGS

"Nothing?" she echoed. "Don't tell me it's nothing. The police don't call and say they want to see you about *nothing*. As if life wasn't hard enough for me on my own! A woman alone, I am, with a young daughter and a great goof of a son to bring up, and all I get is trouble, trouble, trouble and the police calling. And what the neighbours will say, I don't know! And. . . ."

"Aw, Ma!" Sash interrupted. "Stop cracking on! I ain't done anything."

"Don't you tell me to stop cracking on. It's a fine thing when your own mother can't ask questions of her own son in her own home without being told to stop cracking on! It's about time you learned. . . ."

Sash groaned inwardly and let the wordy tide flood over him. He'd tried to stop it. He always tried. He seldom succeeded. He wanted to know what the police said, and if they were uniformed coppers or plain-clothes C.I.D. men, and what time they'd called. But he knew it was useless to ask for at least a half-hour. When Ma got wound up she took all of that time to run down. Words built up in Sash's ma like water behind a self-made dam. Take away the dam and you got drowned in the first flood of words.

Sash sighed, ate his supper, concentrated on thinking out just why the police had called and let Ma's tirade go yacking on.

TONY AND THE SECRET MONEY

Tony was luckier. Neither his father nor Grandma yacked. They had the grown-up habit of questions, but they didn't keep on and on. He also was lucky because the police called as the three of them were finishing supper. Tony's father knew many of the local policemen. One was Police-Constable True. The other was Detective-Constable Kellogg of the C.I.D. Everyone called him Corny.

"Tony? Yes, he's here," said Tony's father, answering the door. "What's he done—robbed a bank?"

They entered the room. Big and burly men, yet strangely quiet-moving.

Grandma liked policemen. "Hello, ducks!" she greeted them. "Cuppa tea?"

Police-Constable True glanced at Corny.

"Don't see why not? Thanks."

"They've come to see Tony, not me," said Tony's father.

"Oh?" Grandma poised the teapot above the cup. "What's the lad done?"

"We've a few questions to ask him. Just routine," said Corny.

Grandma grinned at Tony. "Don't be scared. Coppers are human, same as the rest of us."

Tony remembered Police-Constable True smothered in white paint, and giggled.

"Funny?" Corny asked.

WARNINGS



"What's the lad done?"

WARNINGS

"No," said Tony. "What d'you want to ask me?"

"Were you in Barker's Alley about mid-day today?" True asked.

"Yes."

"Did you see me?"

"Sort of."

"How do you mean—sort of?"

"I saw you but not for long." Tony giggled again. "You're too big to miss seeing."

"All right, Tony, no cracks!" said his father sharply. He glanced at the policemen. "What's this in aid of?"

Corny answered. "Police-Constable True was assaulted in the execution of his duty. A certain person threw a tin of paint over him."

Grandma guffawed with laughter.

"*That* I wish I'd seen. Who did it—Tony?"

"Did you?" his father asked.

"No, I didn't," Tony replied truthfully.

"That's good enough for me," said his father.

"Any more questions?"

"Did you see who did?" True asked Tony.

"No, not really."

"Ah! So you were there when it happened?"

"Maybe I was, but I didn't do it. Maybe it was an accident?"

"Yes," said True heavily. "We've already

TONY AND THE SECRET MONEY

spoken to the one who caused the 'accident'. You're a witness."

"I ain't, y'know," Tony retorted. "I had a glimpse of some white paint being spilled as I was running off."

"Why did you run away?" Corny snapped.

"Hey, just wait on a minute!" said Tony's father. "That's a trick question. You tell us why Tony should have stayed. If there's no good reason for him staying, then there's no crime in him running off."

Corny shrugged. "That's a fair point."

"Where would Tony get any paint from anyway?" said Grandma. "Here's your tea."

Police-Constable True drank noisily. "Thanks. Ah, well now—where would he get paint, and why? That's a fair point too, because a certain person who caused the paint to fall on me denies ever having any paint in his possession."

"Caused the paint to fall on you?" said Grandma in surprise. "That's a new way of saying someone slung a tin of paint at you!"

"How did you know it was a tin?" Corny asked.

"Oh my, oh my!" Grandma's eyes twinkled. "It's quite the smart detective, isn't it? Since when can you buy paint in a paper bag? Must've been in a tin or a pot, or something." She flickered a warning glance at Tony. "You haven't been doing any painting, have you?"

WARNINGS

"Grandma!" said Tony's father sharply. "Don't make trouble where there's no need. We both know that Tony has been helping Sam Betts do some painting, and no doubt the police know it too. But Tony didn't throw any paint."

"We do," said Corny. "And we know he didn't actually throw it. We've got the one who did. But it was your paint, wasn't it?" He looked at Tony."

"Yes," Tony admitted. "Okay then. We were having fun with some other chaps and the paint tin sort of fell. I think someone picked it up and the top flew off."

"Fun?" True queried. "You call it fun to be bullied by Biff Nelson and three of his gang?"

Tony grinned. "Dunno what you mean. Like I said—we were having fun."

"Why be loyal to a trouble-making bully like Biff?" True growled. "We know what goes on, so who d'you think you're kidding?"

Tony stared hard. "Look, Mr True," he said quietly. "What I think of Biff is my business. I'm not afraid of a bully. And I'm not afraid of you. I've done nothing wrong, and I don't care what Biff did."

"You don't care if someone threw paint over me?"

Tony grinned again. "Yes—just as much as

TONY AND THE SECRET MONEY

you'd care if someone threw paint over me! But you'd have to *see* them do it and know they did it on purpose before you could be a witness."

"Fair's fair, gents," said Tony's father. "The boy's right."

"Very well," said Corny. "We'll accept his answers about the paint. But I have a more serious question to ask him."

"Busy feller, aren't you?" said Grandma. "What now?"

"I want to know if Tony came through Barker's Alley earlier this evening?"

Tony paused before answering. A voice inside him whispered:

"Trouble, chum. Trouble from what Sash did. Be careful. Better be honest too. Coppers can be tricky if they catch you out as a liar."

"Let's see now," Tony murmured aloud.

"Now come on, son," said his father. "You must know whether you used the short-cut or not."

"Yes—that's right. On the way home from Sam Betts's place.

Corny nodded as he pulled out a notebook and read it before asking: "Were you alone?"

"No. A friend was with me."

"Who was the friend?"

"Just a friend."

"Don't get coy. We know who it was."

WARNINGS

"Then why ask me?"

"Just answer my questions."

"Flippin' silly questions."

"Okay, so give me some flippin' silly answers," Corny retorted. "Or shall we all go down to the police station and let the inspector ask the questions?"

"Why be awkward, Tony?" said Grandma.

"Let him be awkward," said his father. "Until I'm told what these questions are leading up to."

"You have a right to know that," Corny agreed. "But I'd like to ask one more question first."

"Well, ask it," said Tony.

"Did anything happen as you and your friend came through Barker's Alley this evening?"

"Ah!" said the voice inside Tony. "This is it! If you answer nothing, they'll catch you out, because they must know else they wouldn't be here."

Tony raised his head and looked directly at the detective constable.

"Yes," he said. "We scared a couple of girls. They were giggling like dippy girls do and came around the corner smack into us. We were a bit smothered in paint. Reckon they thought we were ghosts and set up squealing like billy-o."

"Not surprised," said Grandma. "Took me

TONY AND THE SECRET MONEY

twenty minutes to get it off him! Plastered with it, he was."

Corny continued: "So the girls were scared by suddenly seeing your white-spattered figures and screamed. What did you do?"

"Hopped it!" Tony grinned. "Squealing girls are worse than gigglers. I let 'em get on with it."

"Not very courteous, was it?" said True. "Running off and leaving two girls scared out of their wits."

"That's enough," said Tony's father. "My boy is as courteous as any lad towards ladies, but he's no nursemaid to 'em. So what's this all about?"

"We've received a complaint that a couple of boys, one of them answering your son's description, attacked two girls in Barker's Alley this evening."

"Attacked!" Tony exclaimed indignantly. "We never touched 'em—the nitty drips!"

"You'd swear to that on your oath?" Corny asked.

"Of course I would."

The policemen exchanged glances.

"Okay," said Corny, closing his notebook. "I believe you. Thanks for the tea, Grandma."

They moved towards the door. Police-Constable True turned and winked at Tony.

WARNINGS

"Next time you play ghosts, try jumping out and scaring me. I scare so easy. I might boot your backside clear up the alleyway from sheer fright."

Tony chuckled. "Ah! But you wouldn't giggle like a girl, would you?"

"Goodnight," said Corny. "And—just watch it, young Tony. Hear me?"

"Yes, sir," said Tony.

The front door closed behind the policemen.

"You're a proper 'nana, aren't you?" said Tony's father with a grin. "But when I was your age I'd have poured paint over those stupid girls. Given 'em something to squeal about. But don't do it again, eh, son? Promise?"

"Yes, Dad, I promise."

Sash's mother closed the door after Police-Constable True and Detective-Constable Kellogg.

"Oh no, you don't go to bed yet awhile," she flared. "I want to talk to you—you ungrateful, ungentlemanly, wicked, uncouth, no-good little horror! Frightening two poor, defenceless, innocent little girls, and shaming me in front of the neighbours with police calling an' all. Let me tell you. . . ."

"Cor, stone the flippin' crows, Ma!" Sash

TONY AND THE SECRET MONEY

groaned. "You been cracking on all night. I'm tired. Aw, Ma! Yes, Ma! No, Ma! As you say, Ma! . . ."

Sash was late to bed. Tony went early to bed. For each in his own way it had been a busy evening.

CHAPTER 4

GOBBO STRIKES

NEXT morning, Tony met Sash at the supermarket.

"Flippin' shopping!" said Sash. "I'm lumbered with it. Punishment—natch!"

"Your ma didn't like the coppers?"

Sash grinned. "Not on duty anyway. Cor, she didn't half crack on!" He looked defiantly at Tony. "I told 'em I was the one who jumped out—acting like a ghost."

"You needn't have. What's it matter? Dippy girls! You know who they were?" Tony asked.

"One of 'em was little Gobbo's sister. What's their name?"

"Lomas. Diane Lomas, it'd be. Thought I recognised her," said Tony.

"She didn't faint, y'know," said Sash. "They'd been to netball practice. One of her shoe-laces was undone. She trod on it, fell over and bumped her noggin on the corner of a case."

"Did Corny tell you that?"

"Yeah—after kidding Ma that I'd half-murdered someone. Her friend was Clarissa Muddon. Coo, what a perishin' name!" Sash

TONY AND THE SECRET MONEY

screwed up his face and spoke in a high-pitched voice. "Ooh, Clarissa! Unzip me a banana wiv your own dainty donnies!" He scowled. "That's the one we hear squealing in the playground. She'd squeal if she saw an apple turn over!"

"Fancy saying we attacked them!" Tony exclaimed.

Sash scratched his head. "Don't think they meant to. Gobbo's sister didn't realise she'd fallen over her shoe-laces and bumped her own head. Not 'til she did it again when they were running up to a copper. Then Clarissa yelped about them being attacked and Diane kept quiet." Sash sighed gustily. "Just shows how much trouble a girl can make, eh?"

Tony nodded. "Too true. What about Biff and the paint?"

"He'd be for it if the police could prove he threw it on purpose. They can't though, so he'll get off with a caution." Sash glanced up at the clock. "Well, can't stand here yacking with you, chum, else I'll never get to old Sam's place. You go on—I'll join you later."

"Will do." Tony waved as Sash disappeared among the crowd of shoppers.

He used the alley again as a short-cut. Well, why not? He wasn't afraid of meeting Biff and some of his gang. Tony hurried around the corner.

GOBBO STRIKES

Something hard hit him in the tummy. Something soft and squelchy hit him in the back as he doubled up, winded by the first object.

"Shatull stechum!" said a quavering voice.

Tony saw two bandy legs with grubby knees. Then as he straightened up, his gaze came level with a round, ferocious-looking face.

"Gobbo!" Tony gasped. "What's the big idea?"

Gobbo screwed up his lips and blew out a balloon of bubble-gum. "Shlurp!" said Gobbo happily.

Tony blinked, rubbed his stomach and rose to full height, staring down at the small, round-faced, bandy-legged figure.

"What did you mean by—that'll teach 'em?" Tony was one of the few people who could translate Gobbo's speech. Gobbo was a bubble-gum addict. At school it was believed that Gobbo went to sleep still chewing bubble-gum.

"Shrenge," Gobbo splashed.

"Revenge?" Tony queried. "Why d'you want revenge on me? Thought we were friends?" He mopped the side of his neck. "Ugh! What's this sticky stuff?"

"Shplurrentsham," Gobbo explained clearly.

Tony pondered on this, then sniffed the gooey stuff he'd wiped off his neck.

"Blackcurrant jam!" he cried. "You put it in a

TONY AND THE SECRET MONEY

paper bag and slung it at me! I ought to belt you one!”

Gobbo glared defiantly from above a shiny bubble of gum. Then one hand came from behind his back, moving fast. Something white and splodgy smacked on to Tony's nose, then burst.

Gobbo spun around and galloped away up the alley, his little bandy legs pounding like pistons.

Tony's fingers scraped off a sliding lump of blackcurrant jam. He jerked his hand. A gob of jam flew off, sailed within inches of the heads of two women who had just turned the corner of the alley.

“Well, I never!” the first woman exclaimed. “That nearly hit us! What do you think you're doing?”

“Riding a man-eating tiger,” Tony snarled furiously.

“Don't you talk to us like that,” said the second woman. “Or we'll fetch a policeman. How dare you stand there throwing sticky stuff at innocent people! And look at the state you're in. Need a good wash, you do!”

Tony glared at the lumpy, hard-eyed faces.

“It missed you, didn't it? How did I know you were coming round the corner? What are you moaning about? It's me who's smothered in it. I'll murder that Gobbo!”

“Come along, Alice,” said the first woman.

GOBBO STRIKES



"Well I never!"

GOBBO STRIKES

"We can't expect manners from children these days." They strutted off, haughty with offended vanity.

"Aw, get lost!" Tony muttered. "You might at least have asked if I was hurt. How did you know it wasn't blood? Grown-ups want manners, huh! 'Bout time they showed us some!"

Tony was still fuming with anger when he reached Sam Betts's place.

Sam showed more human understanding.

"Been in a fight, lad? Come in, come in—let's help you." He peered closer. "Ah! It's not blood. Gave me quite a shock for a minute. You all right, Tony?"

Tony managed a grin. "Yes, I'm okay. Just smothered in blackcurrant jam."

Sam raised his eyebrows. "H'm! Nice stuff. Better on bread though."

Tony told him what had happened.

Sam roared with laughter. "Little Gobbo, eh? Thought you'd upset his sister so he waited to take revenge on you. With a pot of jam too! Smart little tyke!" Sam passed a towel as Tony finished washing himself at the kitchen sink. "Must've scooted ahead of you into the alley when he saw you coming."

Tony dried his face and neck and frowned thoughtfully.

"Yes, I think I saw him ahead of me. Never

TONY AND THE SECRET MONEY

thought much about it. But he was waiting for me right enough."

"I should give the alley a miss, if I were you," Sam chuckled. "Doesn't seem a very lucky place for you and Sash."

"D'you believe in that? D'you think some places are unlucky for some people?" Tony asked.

Sam shrugged. "I've spent my life doing tricks on the stage. People are easily fooled. Some people believe anything. Would you believe me if I said yes?"

Tony nodded. "Might do."

"Well, I think there are such places. There's been theatres where I always did well, and others where I always had a tough time. Same with towns. Same with houses."

"How d'you know which are lucky?"

"Bless me, lad—how does one know anything? You can only judge by what happens to you. There's places where you never feel right, and other places where you *know* you feel right. I've never felt right in this house."

"Why not?"

"Could be a lot of reasons. But I've never been lucky here. Or let's say things haven't gone well for me ever since we moved in."

"What sort of things, Sam?"

"I started with my aches and pains in the bone joints soon after we came here. That made me

GOBBO STRIKES

clumsy when I was performing tricks. A conjurer has to have good hands, y'see. Then a lot of theatres closed and it was a hard job to get work. Then there was all that trouble over Paul. Then Betsy took ill and died. No—this house isn't lucky, that's for sure."

"Why don't you sell it?"

"Too old, lad. Too tired for all the upset. Haven't had a holiday in years. Might be able to when I've rented the rooms. Perhaps I'll feel better then."

"Not much fun being old, is it, Sam?" Tony asked.

"Sometimes it's not much fun being any age. We all get good days and bad days."

"Well, the rooms will soon be ready," said Tony cheerfully. "I'll start stripping the paper. Sash'll be along soon."

"Good lad! I'll make us all some dinner. The paint shop is sending some paint for the walls, once we've stripped 'em." Sam chuckled. "Thought it safer to have them send it this time!"

Tony was glad when Sam left him alone to start scraping off wallpaper. He liked old Sam. Admired him too, because Sam was clever. Conjurers had to be clever. And Sam was interesting because he'd travelled the world earning his living. But Tony secretly wished

TONY AND THE SECRET MONEY

he'd never promised to help Sam prepare and decorate these rooms.

That's the trouble, Tony thought to himself as he sloshed water on the old wallpaper and began scraping at it. You make promises, let yourself in for all sorts of work, but don't think how much time and effort it's going to take.

He stabbed savagely at the wall with the metal scraper. It sounded so simple. Strip it off, Sash had said, as if it'd be like peeling a banana! Tony ripped a gash about a foot long. Plaster dust fell out of the slit.

Tony groaned to himself. More than one layer of wallpaper to strip off. More than two. Looked like three or four. *And* rotten plaster underneath. Looked as if the whole wall might fall down.

He heard thumping noises on the stairs.

"That you, Sash?"

"Ur!"

"I'm in here."

More thumping, and the sound of Sash's voice muttering angrily. Tony hurried on to the landing as Sash reached the bathroom door. Tony stared, then yelled with laughter.

"It ain't funny," Sash growled, turning his jam-coated face in Tony's direction. "That young pest—I'll murder him! I'll shove his perishing bubble-gum down his throat! I'll. . ."

GOBBO STRIKES



"Gobbo strikes again!"

GOBBO STRIKES

"Gobbo strikes again!" Tony cried. "So he caught you as well!"

Sash looked surprised. "Did he throw this stuff at you too?"

"He sure did."

"Why?"

"Didn't you ask him?"

"No. He shot off before I could grab him."

"Revenge, that's why. Gobbo thinks we hurt his sister," Tony explained.

"But we didn't. She knows it too. I met both girls on my way here. They said they were sorry they'd made trouble for us." Sash mopped at his face with a sticky handkerchief. "Not that I took notice of that. Women pull that trick all the time. They make trouble for you, then come smarming round saying they're sorry. Ma does it all the time. She says it keeps a man on the hop. I'm going to wash this off."

Sash disappeared into the bathroom.

Tony went back to sloshing at the wallpaper. Sash came in after a time. He watched Tony for a minute.

"Some job we took on," Sash observed.

"You just found that out?" said Tony nastily. "I bet this paper hasn't been stripped for fifty years."

"Won't it pull off now you've loosened a patch?" Sash gripped a wedge of paper and heaved.

TONY AND THE SECRET MONEY

The wedge of paper and a powdering of plaster came away with a rush. Sash staggered and fell on his backside.

"Go on—wreck the flippin' place!" Tony snapped. "It needs more soaking before we can start pulling it off without breaking the plaster."

Sash didn't answer.

"Well, don't sit there all day. What are you trying to do? Read it?" Tony asked.

"Look! Take a good look between those layers of paper I ripped off!" Sash exclaimed.

"It's all old wallpaper. Different patterns, that's all."

"Yeah?" Sash peeled open the wedge and held it up. "Take a *good* look, and forget about making funnies. This ain't no joke."

Tony inspected the wedge of paper carefully. Then slowly he gazed wide-eyed at Sash.

"Money!" he whispered. "Bank notes sandwiched between the layers of wallpaper!" Tony stared at the grimy, faded walls. "What if they've been pasted all round the room? How many will there be?"

"Flippin' fahsands!" said Sash. "And if there are. . . ." He gulped. "Then how honest are we?"

Tony shook his head sadly.

"Oh, mate!" he murmured. "Right now, I I just dunno!"

CHAPTER 5

RIGHT OR WRONG?

COMES a time when you need help. Not help that you can see and feel, like borrowing money, or a bike, or being given a present of something you want. But help that will make you feel right with yourself and with other people.

This is the most difficult help of all because you don't really want it. You just want someone to tell you it's okay to do the wrong thing so long as you have the right reasons.

So you find some money. So you know what it's like never to have enough money. Like Sash, you see your mother suffering all the time because there's never really enough money to feed and clothe you and your kid sister and pay the rent and all else.

Or like Tony, who is better off because the man of his family has a good job. But even so, there isn't much spare, and about a week's holiday a year is all they can afford. In that way, Tony's family have more than Sash's family.

Sash's little sister Sunny is away on a holiday paid for by some child welfare association. Sash

TONY AND THE SECRET MONEY

feels bad about this because he doesn't like charity. Sash would like to take Sunny on a smashing holiday himself—not have her sent off with strangers.

Tony is happy enough, but come the winter and he wonders how it is that some people can go live in the sun abroad for about three months. He's been told that everyone has to work for a living. So how can those people have their photos taken in places where it's warm and sunny while his grandma's cough gets worse and worse as winter drags on?

At these times, Tony's questions become angry, and the answers he receives are not very clear. It seems that you work to get money, but some people get money without working. And no one has yet proved to Tony why it's right that this should happen.

So when you sit staring at walls which may contain a fortune in hidden money—what do you do? Who do you tell? Do you tell anyone at all?

Suddenly you feel different. All very well being noble and honest. Does that pay for Grandma to spend winter in the sun? Does that pay for Sunny and her mother to have nice clothes and holidays? Well, it hasn't done so up to now.

So your mind goes leaping on. Wow! What

RIGHT OR WRONG?

couldn't you do with lots of money! That's why you hesitate. That's why you don't rush down to old Sam shouting: "Look what we've found!"

Ah yes! Old Sam!

"S'pose it belongs to him really," said Sash gloomily.

Tony nodded. "S'pose so."

"Finders keepers. We could give him *some*," Sash suggested.

"There's a law," said Tony. "I read about it. It's called stealing by finding, if you find something and keep it. Besides—it might be stolen, or something."

"Who cares? It's here, ain't it? If anyone knew it was here, they'd have come for it. May not belong to Sam at all. What about that Paul bloke? D'you reckon he put it here?"

"Who else?" Tony inspected the larger piece of torn-off paper they had now removed. "This isn't all real wallpaper," he announced. "Look, Sash—there are four layers of paper. The next to the plaster is old wallpaper. See the pattern?"

"M'm." Sash nodded as he looked close. "Then there's a layer of smooth paper over that! then the banknotes, then another layer of smooth paper over those."

"Yes, and the top layer is real wallpaper with a pattern. These smooth layers are some special

TONY AND THE SECRET MONEY

stuff. And look! No wonder I couldn't soak it off! The water doesn't go through beyond the top layer."

"That makes sense," said Sash. "The paper that seals the money on to the wall would have to be waterproof, wouldn't it? Lots of water would ruin the banknotes."

"But they must be stuck on," Tony insisted. "We've torn several though it's easy to piece them together." He examined the torn-off piece more carefully. "Hey, look! The money is stuck to the top piece as well as the bottom piece!"

"'Course," said Sash. "Else it would fall off, wouldn't it?"

Tony shook his head. "No, I don't mean that. Take another look. See how each note is stuck? The five-pound notes are fixed by the centre to the top paper, and the pound notes are fixed by the corners to the bottom paper. Seems like the top is all fivers and the under-piece all oncers."

"Cor, stone the flippin' crows!" Sash gasped. "There's a perishing fortune here!" He gripped Tony's arm. "Couldn't we sort of strip a part of the wall and take ourselves a nice little packet of lolly, then tell old Sam so's he'll have the rest?"

Tony squatted on his heels, gazing around the room.

RIGHT OR WRONG?



"Cor, stone the flippin' crows!"

RIGHT OR WRONG?

"I don't like it, mate. How're we going to use the money?" He held up his hand. "Okay, don't tell me! I know we've both got plenty of uses for it. But my dad wouldn't go for me tipping hundreds of lolly notes on the table. He'd ask a heap of questions, so we wouldn't be able to keep it quiet. What about your ma?"

"Ah! That'd be tricky too," Sash admitted. "She'd spoil any surprise by yacking about it to the neighbours. Anything Ma hears just naturally goes in one ear and out her mouth. And even if she didn't, then the neighbours would start poking and prying. Ma's aunt helped to buy us a washing machine two weeks ago—remember?"

"Nice present," said Tony.

"Yeah. But every flippin' neighbour knew we had it even before it was delivered. Cor lummy, they even check up if young Sunny buys more sweets than usual! Can you guess how they'd act if our family suddenly had lots of lolly to spend?"

"Well, we've got the same sort of neighbours."

"It's different for you. Ma's on her own, see? These old gossip women just naturally pick on the likes of her. Like a lot of cannibals, they are!" Sash sighed. "No—the only way I could do Ma and Sunny any good would be for me to disappear—go right away some place—then come back with lots of lolly."

TONY AND THE SECRET MONEY

"It wouldn't work," said Tony. "We're not grown-up enough."

"Stinks! That's what," said Sash. "Life stinks! People stink! I hate people! They spoil things. Always they spoil things. Yacketty-yack! Why this? Why that? Fancy this! Fancy that! Well, I never! Have you heard about Mrs Flannelbonce? Then they sniff, shrug their shoulders, smile their leery smiles. Not with their eyes though. You noticed that, Tony? Got eyes like flippin' fishes, they have—all cold and glaring!"

Tony grinned. "You love your neighbours."

"Like they love me!" Sash retorted. "But if I walked in home with pocketsful of money, they'd hate my guts. Crummy lot!"

"Your ma too?"

"Nah! Ma's okay. She likes to laugh. Don't have much to laugh about though. Poor old Ma—she never does nothing right! Reckon I take after her. So now when there's a chance maybe to do big things—here we sit yacking."

"Got to, haven't we?" said Tony. "I mean, it's big. We talk so's to find ways. Silly to grab what we can and rush off with it. I wanted to though."

"Me too."

"So we tell Sam?"

Sash shrugged. "S'pose we'd better."

RIGHT OR WRONG?

"He's a decent old bloke," said Tony. "He deserves a break too. Like holidays in the sun, come winter. Help his aches."

Sash brightened. "He'd give us some, wouldn't he? Like a commersion?"

"Commission."

"Well, what's in a name? Still means lolly to us."

Tony moved to the door. He smiled at Sash.

"Biff would call us crackers."

"Phooey to Biff! I'm me. You're you. Y'know something Tony?"

"What?"

"That trouble yesterday—all over an accident and a daft joke. Police an' all. Upsetting Ma, and at your home too. Neighbours yacking. Us feeling guilty. So what would happen if we swiped this?"

"No joy for us," said Tony seriously. "If we took this secret money we'd have no peace."

Sash giggled. "Seems like when you've got peace you've got no money. It's a stinkerro, that's what!"

They reached the kitchen. A pot bubbled and hissed on the stove. Sam Betts lay huddled in the far corner.

"Sam!" Tony sprang to the old man's side. Sam opened his eyes.

"Doctor," he whispered. "Phone for doctor."

TONY AND THE SECRET MONEY

Some money on shelf. Doc's phone number on a card. Hurry!"

"Stay with him, Sash!" Tony rushed into the sitting-room, found a pile of pennies and a card bearing a telephone number, and dashed from the house.

CHAPTER 6

BURGLARS

“A MILD attack,” said the doctor as the ambulance took Sam off to hospital. “The old chap’s been doing too much. Should have gone for a holiday after his wife died. It was a big shock to him.”

“Will he be okay?” Tony asked.

“Yes, he’ll be as good as new after a short rest and treatment. It’s lucky you were in the house, and lucky you caught me before I left home.”

“Glad he’s not too ill,” said Sash. He glanced at Tony. “Well, I mean—if he had some sort of news he didn’t expect, would the shock kill him? An old boy in our flats dropped down dead when he heard he’d won a bet on a horse.”

The doctor laughed. “If you’ve got some good news for Sam it’ll keep for a day or two, won’t it? And if it’s bad news, then I should forget it for a week or so. He needs rest and no worry. In any case, don’t break it to him too suddenly so the news comes as too much of a surprise. Goodbye to you both. Thanks for your help.”

When the doctor had gone, Tony said:

TONY AND THE SECRET MONEY

"Smart question, Sash. I was wondering how I could ask it."

Sash grinned happily. "I got brains, y'know. Got a mean mind too." He stared hard at Tony.

"No!" said Tony firmly. "We'd decided what to do. We'll just have to wait a bit before we tell Sam. But we're not—repeat NOT—swiping that money just because Sam's in hospital."

"Could do though. Easy. No one to see us." Sash shrugged. "I ain't saying you're wrong. But that don't make me like it."

"Are we going to quarrel over it?"

"Why should we?" Sash winked. "I might sort of walk in my sleep—then when you come back tomorrow you'll find the room stripped."

Tony laughed. "And the best of luck, mate! It'll take you more than one night to strip it. And you'll have a tough job carrying it away. Half of it will have plaster stuck to each strip." He paused. "Tell you what we could do."

"What?"

"Go and have some grub, then pick up an empty case, come back here and fill it. We could separate the bank notes in my room at home."

"Ah, grub!" Sash rubbed his stomach. "Let's go!"

They locked the house carefully. In the cafe, Sash said:

BURGLARS

"What happens if your Dad or Grandma catch us separating the lolly?"

"Ssh! Keep your voice down, you dope! These seat partitions are thin."

"Aw, who knows what we're yacking about? I think it's risky. Why not do the separating at Sam's place?"

"Neighbours might come in," said Tony.

"We'd lock the doors."

"Then they'd be suspicious. Old Ma Parrott next door is a real old busybody. And she doesn't like us."

Sash grinned. "She's a widow. Maybe feels Sam's house needs the gentle touch of a woman's hand—now his wife's gone."

"Where d'you pick up that sort of talk?"

"Ma's magazines. Those stories make me laugh like a drain, they do."

"Pooh, stories!" Tony sneered. "They're not like real life."

"No? They are to Ma. And if old Ma Parrott knew Sam might have a load of lolly, you'd need a flippin' atom bomb to keep her out of his front room." Sash scratched his head thoughtfully. "That's an idea, y'know."

"What is?"

"My Ma and old Sam. Well, I mean to say—if he's going to have lolly and a bad heart he'll need someone to look after him. Ma would do it fine."

TONY AND THE SECRET MONEY

And I'd help, and so would Sunny." Sash's eyes gleamed. "Yeah! Some idea, eh, mate!"

"You're crackers!"

Their seat rocked as customers from beyond the seat partition got up noisily. Biff and his three companions paused at the table.

"Hiya, little nits!" Biff sneered.

"Hiya, big nit!" said Tony.

"Painted any coppers recently?" Sash asked.

"Drop dead!" said Moosh.

"After you," said Tony politely.

"C'mon," said Biff. "They ain't nothing but nothings." He slouched off, followed by his mates.

Tony glanced at Sash. "You and your big mouth! Biff was sat the other side all the time."

"So what did I say?"

"Talking about Sam and him having money."

"Did I say anything about where it was?"

"Oh, all right!" Tony growled. "It's done now anyway. Are you going back to Sam's place while I fetch a case?"

"Okay. I'll carry on stripping."

Grandma insisted on packing up some tea for Tony and Sash as they'd only had a snack for dinner, so Tony was longer than he expected.

He found Sash sitting on the floor smothered in white dust and surrounded by chunks of paper-covered plaster. Great gaps appeared over almost

BURGLARS



"C'mon," said Biff. "They ain't nothing but nothings."

BURGLARS

the whole of one wall. The wooden slats showed between jagged edges of broken plaster.

"And a good time was had by all!" Tony jeered. He pointed to a hammer and chisel. "Don't tell me you've been trying to strip paper with those?"

Sash nodded glumly. "Seemed like a good idea, but half the flippin' wall fell down!" He brightened and grinned happily through the plaster dust. "Well, it's off anyway! Saved a lot of time, that has."

"Can you fix new plaster?"

Sash chuckled. "I can learn."

"Looks like you'll have to. What a mess!" Tony picked up a piece. The plaster crumbled in his hands. "Reckon it needed replacing. It's rotten. Wouldn't have been able to stick new paper on it. Hey! This piece is layered with fivers!"

Sash held up another piece. "So's this. Whoever put 'em here must've run out of one-pound notes. Old Sam can afford to have the whole house plastered!"

Tony opened the case. "Let's shake off the loose plaster and pack the pieces in here. I've told Grandma we're coming back to work on a secret invention."

"What are we inventing?"

"Nothing, you dope! But Dad and Gran don't

TONY AND THE SECRET MONEY

bother me if I say I'm working in my room. Dad says a man is entitled to be quiet on his own if he wants. They won't come in and disturb us. It'll be too risky at our hide-out."

"Lucky you! Ma ain't the quiet type. And as for me being left on my own—cor, that'll be the day in our house!"

They packed the case but had to leave three pieces which wouldn't go in. Tony put these in a cupboard.

"Might as well clean off the last bits from that wall," he suggested. "Then we can be ready to start on the other walls tomorrow."

The remaining plaster came away easily enough. Soon the whole wall was stripped. Tony tapped the next wall.

"This plaster is better. Feels more solid."

Sash pressed his hands on the paper. "Wonder if there's any money under this lot too?"

Tony moved his hands over the wall. "Dunno, but the paper feels thick. It's the biggest wall too. There's not much paper around the window side, or the fireplace. Let's sweep up and have some tea. I'm going to the hospital later this evening. Gran's buying some goodies for me to take to Sam. Will you come with me?"

"No can do," said Sash. "Ma's going out. I've got to stay in and wait for the club man. Ma

BURGLARS

ain't paid him for three weeks, so I've got to give him an earful of the old smooch."

"That's not very fair—leaving you to cope with the instalment collector."

"I like doing it. Ma always buys more than she needs. These club salesmen talk her into it, then get nasty when she can't pay up each week. But they don't frighten me. I like to hear 'em whining for their money. Stinking lot, they are! That's what I mean—see? If Ma could team up with a nice old bloke with a bit of cash, then she wouldn't need to buy off those swindle-hawkers."

"Dad says you shouldn't buy things you can't afford to pay for," said Tony.

Sash laughed. "Listen, mate, I keep telling you—it's different for you. There's times when I could bop Ma on the noggin she's that wappy with her yacking and gossiping. But she's a ducky old duck really, and I ain't having no tallyman bullying her for trying to dress Sunny and me in proper clothes, or fixing herself a few fancies. Women need fancies. And Ma looks real good when she's all tarted up. I can't earn any money yet, but I can stop her from being pestered. Satisfied?"

Tony nodded. "'Course I am. D'you need some cash? I've got some in the Post Office. You can have it. Pay off the tallyman."

TONY AND THE SECRET MONEY

"Not on your nelly!" Sash exclaimed indignantly. "Besides, he'd probably drop down dead if I paid him. It'd be cruelty. Thanks all the same, mate. Well, how about that grub?"

They made themselves comfortable in Sam's sitting-room, switched on the telly and passed a pleasant hour before locking up carefully and leaving the house.

A hawk-faced woman came to the front gate of the house next door as they left.

"And how is poor Mr Betts?" she asked.

"We don't know yet, ma'am," said Tony. "I'm seeing him tonight. The doc says he needs a rest."

"Oh dear, don't we all! Life's so hard when you're alone. Tell him Mrs Parrott sends her best regards and to let me know if there's anything he wants."

"Not you, mate," Sash muttered.

"Yes, I'll tell him." Tony kicked Sash on the ankle.

"You're helping him clean those upstairs rooms, aren't you?" She sniffed. "Not really boys' work, is it? Not that I'm sure but you mean well. You've locked up properly, haven't you? Didn't I hear the TV on? You didn't break it, did you? Poor Mr Betts loves his TV."

"Yes, ma'am, we locked up. No, ma'am, we didn't break the TV," Tony replied politely.

BURGLARS



"Didn't I hear the TV on?"

BURGLARS

"I'll give Mr Betts your message." He yanked Sash's arm and hurried away before she could fire more questions.

"Silly old faggot!" said Sash, and mimicked: "'Oh dear, ain't life hard! Poor Mr Betts! Let me know if he wants anything!' Cor, lumme, if she's that eager to help old Sam, why isn't she up at the hospital right now? Always yacking—never doing."

"You've got no human kindness." Tony chuckled.

"I got no time for fakes," Sash growled.

Grandma was out and his father not back from work, so Tony and Sash were able to concentrate on the job of peeling bank notes from between layers of paper. Pieces of wallpaper stuck to them. After a time, the boys became more expert at peeling off the notes. The piles between them grew quite high.

"I'll have to go soon." Sash glanced at Tony's wall clock. "We've still got three pieces to do."

"I'll do them later." Tony pointed to the newspapers spread over the floor. "Let's roll the dirty plaster in those and stuff it in the case."

"How much is there here?" Sash fingered the notes.

"You count while I clean up," said Tony. "There was over three hundred pounds at the last count."

TONY AND THE SECRET MONEY

Sash finished counting just as Tony completed the cleaning up.

"Guess how much?"

Tony shrugged. "Dunno. A thousand?"

"Two hundred and ten in one-pound notes, and two hundred and thirty-eight five-pound notes. How much is that?" said Sash.

Tony did quick arithmetic, aided by his fingers.

"Eleven hundred and ninety pounds," he announced. "That means fourteen hundred pounds altogether!"

"Wow!" Sash whistled softly. "That's some lolly!" He stood up suddenly. "I'm going. I ain't very strong-minded. Put it away before I grab a handful!"

"Okay!" Tony swept the money into the case, stowed the case in his cupboard and turned to grin at Sash. "Wouldn't take much to weaken me right now. Phew! Never seen so much money in my life. Meet you Sam's place in the morning?"

"I'll be there. You'll bring the case?"

"You bet I will!"

Sash left. Tony had a wash. His father came in, followed shortly after by Grandma. They had supper and talked on this and that. But Tony's mind kept floating into his bedroom and the case containing fourteen hundred pounds.

It was a mixed feeling to be talking about

BURGLARS

ordinary things yet keeping secret the fact that there was enough money in the house to provide smashing holidays for all of them. And a fridge for Grandma and new furniture, and—and—and. . . .

Tony had a hard job getting to sleep, then had a nightmare in which he was suffocating under a pile of plaster-covered bank notes. He woke up with a mouthful of blanket. He was glad when morning came.

Sash hadn't arrived when Tony let himself into Sam's house. But *someone* had been there. The downstairs rooms were in a terrible state of upheaval. Cupboards ripped open, drawers tipped out on the floor. Ornaments smashed, cushions ripped.

Upstairs was as bad. Floorboards had been pulled up, the bathroom cabinet emptied. The cupboard in the back room had been forced open. The pieces of plaster and old paper were gone.

Slightly dazed by the shock, Tony turned to find Sash in the doorway.

"I saw downstairs," said Sash huskily. "I called, but you didn't hear me. Who's done it, Tony? Who?"

"I've been thinking about it," said Tony slowly. "No burglar would bother with poor old Sam's few things. Not a real burglar. Someone

TONY AND THE SECRET MONEY

thought there was money hidden here. They've opened everything to find it. Looked under the floorboards too. There's only one person who'd have reason to do it. And all because of you and your big mouth!"

"Biff!" Sash yelled. "I don't care how big he is—I'll murder him! Let's set the police on him too."

"We can't," said Tony. "Don't you see? This is Sam's secret as well as ours. How do we explain about the money? How about the shock to old Sam? How much else is hidden in these walls? The burglars took those pieces we left in the cupboard. They might come back and strip the other walls. We've got to trap Biff ourselves."

"Supposing it isn't him?"

"Then we'll break the news to Sam—break it gently—and let him decide whether he wants the police in on it," said Tony. "If it *is* Biff, then we'll have to move fast. Are you with me?"

"I ain't nowhere else, mate!" said Sash.

CHAPTER 7

HIDE-OUT ATTACK

MRS PARROTT was waiting at her gate as they left. She glared at them.

"If you and your friends go in Mr Betts's house again tonight and make so much noise, I'll send for the police! Banging and crashing about!"

"It wasn't. . . ." Sash began indigantly. But Tony interrupted him.

"Did you see us, ma'am?" he asked.

"See you? Think I'm a cat? Can't see in the dark. Saw the shape of you as you left. You and a taller boy."

"So you couldn't swear it was us?"

"Of course it was you!" She peered suspiciously at Tony. "Wasn't it?"

"No, ma'am, but we know who it was. At least, we think we do."

"Oh! Well, if they're friends of yours, just you tell them. . . ."

"They're not friends of ours," Tony cut in. "But we're certainly going to tell them. Good morning." He nudged Sash and they hurried away.

TONY AND THE SECRET MONEY

They halted near the alley.

"Now what?" Sash asked. "Where're we going?" He clenched his fists, waving them under Tony's nose. "After Biff and his mates, of course!"

Tony nodded. "Yes, but we've got to prove he bust into Sam's place and swiped some of the hidden money. When I saw Sam last night I gave him a hint about a pleasant surprise."

"What did he say?"

Tony frowned. "Said he didn't believe any place used by Paul could contain a pleasant surprise. He wasn't even interested in what the surprise might be. I don't understand why he feels that way."

Sash shrugged. "None of our business, is it? Bet he'll be more interested when he knows there's lots of lolly. Anyway—we can't let Biff get away with it, can we?"

"We'll go down to Biff's hide-out and snoop around. Biff and his gang don't usually go there until evening time."

"You're a crafty one! How long have you known about Biff's hide-out?" Sash asked.

Tony grinned. "Since last night. Found out by accident. I met Gobbo. He hates Biff because Biff makes fun of him. Gobbo's sister told him about the hide-out. She and her friend have been there."

HIDE-OUT ATTACK

"Could you understand everything Gobbo said?"

"More or less. Remember Turner's old flour warehouse down by the river? It's been empty for months. Even since Turner's were taken over by another company. Biff and his gang have rigged up a hide-out near what used to be the loading bay. Where they slung sacks of flour from barges on the river."

"Let's go then!" Sash was eager. He moved off, paused and turned back. "Hey! How about rounding up some of our old gang and making it a real raid?"

"Great minds think alike!" Tony laughed. "I've been thinking about that just this minute. It'd be a lot of fun—but it's no go."

"Why not?"

"The secret money, that's why. The less people we tell, the less trouble there'll be—especially for Sam."

"M'm." Sash nodded. "S'pose you're right. But Biff and his mates know. They must do by now."

"They'll keep it quiet," said Tony. "Biff's greedy and mean. He might not even have told his gang."

"So's he can swipe all the lolly for himself!" Sash exclaimed. "That makes sense. Right! Let's go snooping!"

TONY AND THE SECRET MONEY

Tall, battered and grimey, the warehouse stood like a lofty, sagging cowshed on the river bank. A relic of old-time days of prosperity.

Tony and Sash approached along the tow-path, keeping close to a high broken fence. They ran from the edge of the fence to duck under broken planks of what once had been a landing stage.

"It's somewhere up there," Tony whispered. "There's a small door at the end of this landing stage."

"Big doors," Sash observed as he peered through the broken planks. "Two with boards nailed across them."

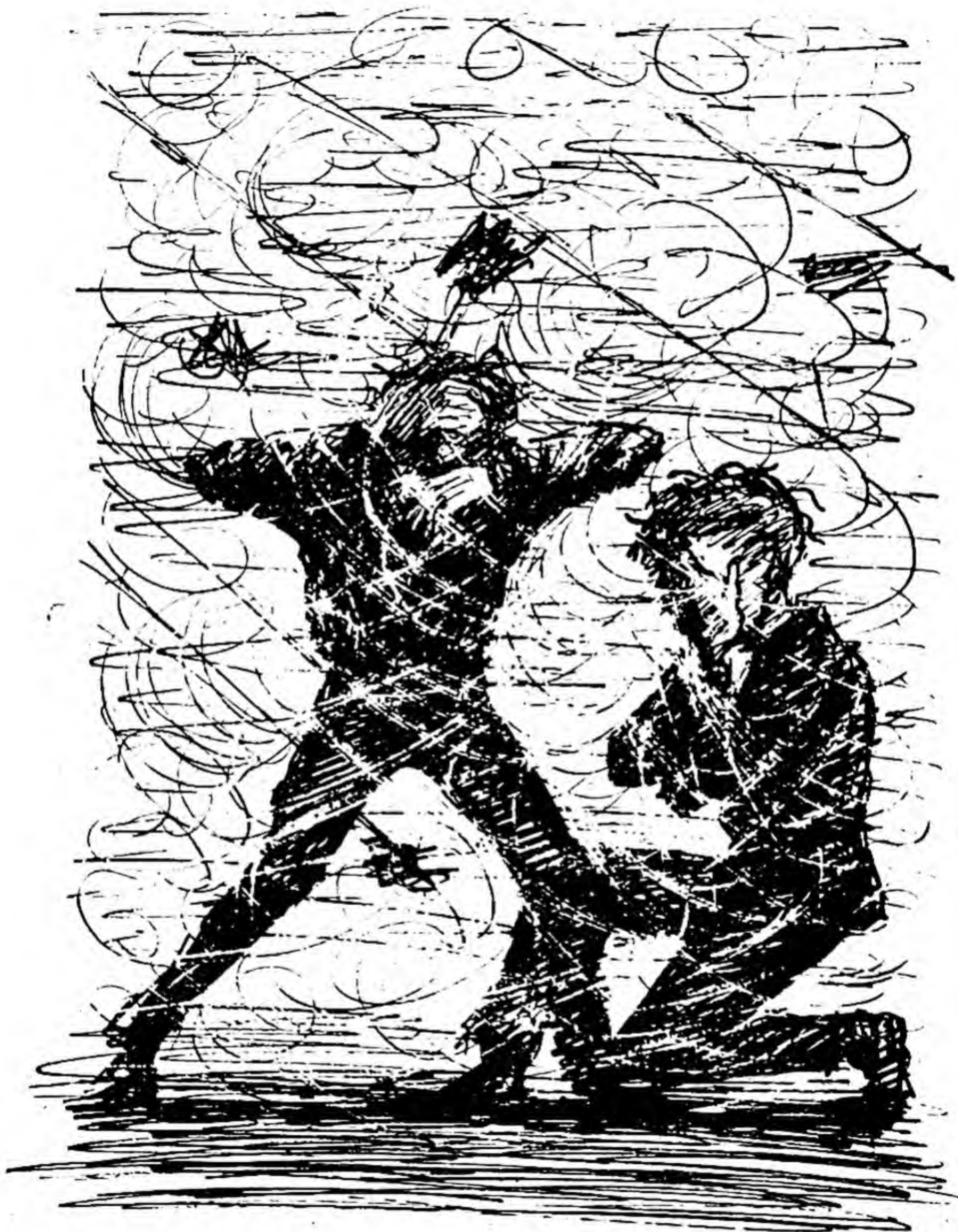
"Not them. They're the old loading doors. See that row of windows?" Tony pointed. "The small door is below those. Let's crawl up towards the big doors, then dive to the right. Ready?"

"Ready!" Sash nodded.

They had nearly reached the doors when suddenly the air was filled with choking dust as objects burst against the doors and several hit their shoulders and arms. Then one hit Sash on the nose. Brownish-white powder sprayed over him. Sash fell, coughing and spluttering, half-blinded.

Tony leapt to help his friend as more objects hurtled around them. One hit Tony's head and

HIDE-OUT ATTACK



The air was filled with choking dust

HIDE-OUT ATTACK

he felt something gritty trickling down his neck.

"Ambushed!" Tony gasped. "We're ambushed and outnumbered. We'll have to retreat!"

"I can't flippin' well see!" Sash cried in a mixture of pain and anger. "Dirty slob—pelting us with muck!"

"Hold on to me." Tony grabbed Sash and led him back under the safety of the broken landing stage.

From some place to the side of the big doors, Biff's voice yelled: "Get out and stay out or we'll murder you! That was only a sample of what you'll get if you snoop around here again!"

Tony eased his head and shoulders through a gap in the planks. The dirty windows of the warehouse were as lifeless as a dead man's eyes.

"I'll get you, Biff!" Tony called. "This is war!" He couldn't sight a face at any of the windows. Biff must be watching from a different part of the warehouse.

Tony couldn't turn easily nor move quickly because of the jagged edges of planking around him. So although he heard another object whizzing close to him, he couldn't duck. It hit him on the forehead, burst and showered dust over his face. Tony lowered himself to safety.

"You're bleeding!" Sash helped Tony to

TONY AND THE SECRET MONEY

cover. "Dirty rats! Here—take my handkerchief."

Tony blinked his eyes rapidly to clear them, looked at the grubby piece of linen and grinned through streaks of dust.

"No—you keep it to clean your boots. I've got one." Tony mopped his face, dabbing at his cut forehead. "Not bleeding much now. D'you know what they're using for ammunition?"

"Dirt," said Sash. "They've made paper bombs of it."

"Well, there's dirt mixed with it, but it's old flour. Must be lashings of it lying around inside there."

"And Biff can pick us off before we get close enough to bash in that door. We ain't going to surprise him, mate. He's got himself a super hide-out."

"Yes, but it's a spooky old place. Bet there's hundreds of rats too. But we've *got* to get in there!"

"How?"

"Shut up and let me think."

Sash shut up and wiped his face and neck, silently watching Tony. Sash had great respect for Tony's thinking. Tony was a good friend in a fight. But unlike Biff and his mates, Tony often *thought* his way out of trouble sooner than trying to bash his way out. And because Tony

HIDE-OUT ATTACK

thought things out first, he usually managed to escape trouble

Sash knew his own weakness well enough. He never thought hard enough before he did or said things. Like that acting a ghost in the alley. Like saying things just to sound big. Sash knew he'd save himself a lot of trouble if only he had Tony's ability to think just a little bit harder.

Sash knew that Tony wasn't always right. But he was right more times than Sash, and not forever in trouble over doing or saying some daft things.

Tony emerged from his thinking.

"Yes, that's what we'll do," he announced. "Break off a piece of stick for me, Sash. About two feet long."

Sash did so, then watched Tony fasten his handkerchief to the stick.

"What's to do?" he asked.

"You'll see." Tony thrust the stick through an opening above him and waved it vigorously, then yelled:

"Truce, Biff! I want to parley!"

Silence for a moment.

"Okay," Biff called. "You got a truce. Now talk."

Tony eased his head and shoulders through the opening.

"I know you bust into Sam's place. I know

TONY AND THE SECRET MONEY

you stole something valuable. But I don't want trouble so I'll give you until seven o'clock tonight to return it to me. If you don't hand it over, then I'll tell the police and you'll be in real trouble."

Sash tugged at Tony's leg. "Are you crackers?" he hissed. "Now you've given the secret away!"

Tony ignored Sash and waited for Biff to reply. He saw a movement behind a gap in the wall to the right of the landing stage. So that's where they are! Tony thought triumphantly. I reckon they've got an emergency exit at the side of the building!

Biff called: "Can you hear me, you toffee-nosed nit?"

"Yes."

"Then pin back your lug-holes and listen real hard! You don't bluff me, see? What I stole ain't nothing to what you've stolen. So unless you bring half of it to me here at seven o'clock tonight, I'll see you and your mate get more police trouble than you can handle—*after* me and my gang have finished with you! Hear me?"

"I hear you." Tony paused, as if thinking hard.

"Better answer then. And quick!" Biff yelled. "You've got lots more to lose than me. But I

HIDE-OUT ATTACK

ain't greedy. Half is all I want of you-know-what."

"Yes—I-know-what." Tony pretended to be half-scared.

"Cor, stone the flippin' crows!" Sash raged. "Ain't you no sense?"

Tony kicked out his foot. Sash fell back.

"Okay, Biff," Tony called. "Seven o'clock. We'll be here. How do we get in?"

"Through the little door. We'll be waiting. And no tricks, Tony boy, or not even your dear old granny will recognise you by the time we're through with you! Now clear off!"

Tony eased down to join his furious friend.

"Done it, you have!" Sash raved. "Done it proper. And I thought you were smart!"

Tony chuckled. "Did I sound soft?"

"Soft! Like a jelly, man, and twice as trembly!"

"Good!"

"Good, he says! For why good?"

"Can you *prove* Biff bust into Sam's house? Can you *prove* he's taken some of the hidden money?"

"Ur—well. . . ." Sash hesitated.

"Yes or no," Tony insisted.

"No. I can't prove it."

"Well, I just did. I figured Biff for a greedy, big-headed thief and I've just proved it."

"How?"

TONY AND THE SECRET MONEY

“Because if he hadn’t known anything about the hidden money, how did he know what I was talking about?”

Sash nodded slowly. “That’s twisty, but it makes sense. But you said you’d bring him half of what we’ve got.”

“What I said and what he’ll get are two different things. C’mon, bird-brain! We’ve got lashings of work to do by evening time!”

CHAPTER 8

THE BUILD-UP

FROM small, simple acts there can flow a number of events building up and up until, of a sudden, you seem surrounded by troubles. Long words, but easy enough to understand if you think of it as being like a small stone thrown into a calm pool.

The stone goes plop into the water and disappears. Just a small stone. Just a simple act of throwing it into the pool. But is that the end of it?

It's a simple act of kindness to help a lonely old man clean and paint some rooms. But if Tony and Sash hadn't offered to do this, they wouldn't have been carrying tins of paint when they met Biff in the alley. And there wouldn't have been any paint to splash over Police-Constable True. So the ripples spread wider because a policeman with paint all over his uniform has to explain to his sergeant how it happened.

The sergeant says: "That Biff again, eh? We'll get him for this!"

The sergeant tells the inspector, who says in

TONY AND THE SECRET MONEY

his Scot's voice: "Yon laddie needs a lesson. He's getting o'er big for his breeches!"

The ripples are spreading wider and wider.

But the biggest ripple of all is finding the secret money. Then while Tony and Sash are eating a meal, Biff's sharp ears overhear some remarks made by Sash. So off go Biff and his mates to find out what's in it for them. And Tony and Sash go after Biff in his hide-out.

This would seem to be the end of the ripples spreading out from that one simple act. But now there comes another really big ripple.

A shopkeeper named Marks phones the police about a five-pound note he's been given by a customer. The shop was busy at the time and Marks didn't think to check the note until he was cashing up his till to pay in his takings to the bank.

The police sent Detective-Constable Kellogg to investigate Marks's claim that there was something wrong with the five-pound note. It was very dirty, looked as if it had been stuck to something, and Marks was sadly afraid it was a dud.

The detective took the note and a description of the youth who bought a sweat shirt and pair of jeans and gave the five-pound note in payment.

Marks's shop was on Police-Constable True's

THE BUILD-UP

beat, so it was natural that he and Detective-Constable Kellogg should meet.

"What's to do, Corny?" said True. "Old Marks had another shoplifter?"

Corny explained what was to do.

"The description fits that perisher Biff right enough," True declared. "Where does he get five-pound notes from?"

Corny tapped his pocket. "I dunno," he replied grimly. "But if this note is what I think it is, then young Biff is going to be pulled in for passing forged money."

"Forged!" True goggled.

"That's what I said."

True rubbed his chin thoughtfully. "Wish I was in on this. I'd give a week's pay to cop that young layabout."

"You still think he threw the paint over you?"

"Let's say he didn't make much effort to stop it hitting me. I wouldn't want to be unfair to the little creep," True added nastily. "We mustn't be unfair to the kiddie-winks, must we? But resisting arrest on a charge of passing forged money! Now that might cause him to fall in the river, or black his eye against a door, or break an arm. Or something trivial!"

Corny laughed softly. "Better not let the inspector hear that sort of talk. You're supposed not to let your feelings interfere with your duty."

TONY AND THE SECRET MONEY

"So they tell me," True sighed gently. "Ah well, maybe my turn will come."

"D'you know where Biff and his mates hang out?"

"Often find 'em in one of the coffee bars. They roam the streets quite a bit."

"Do they have a hide-out?"

"Ah! Now that's an interesting question. They used to have a place back of that second-hand car dump, but they got cleared out a few weeks ago."

"Have they found a new one?" Corny asked.

True nodded. "I think they have. Not on my beat though."

"Where?"

"Down by the river. Probably in that old flour warehouse. One of my mates fishes the river near there. He told me he'd seen several lads around that old place."

"I'll report it," said Corny. "Maybe the inspector will detail you to help us find Biff."

True's eyes gleamed. "You do that, chum, and I'll buy you a row of pints!"

"Okay. I'll do what I can. Be seeing you!"

Detective-Constable Kellogg climbed into his car and drove off.

Meanwhile, Tony and Sash were busy with preparations for their evening date at Biff's hide-out. They also visited some shops and spent

THE BUILD-UP

a few shillings on necessary purchases at a grocer's and a stationer's. They didn't meet Biff, although he too was doing some personal shopping, but of a different kind.

Tony and Sash were shortly losing their basement hide-out, because the empty house was to be pulled down.

"If we lick Biff, we might take over his hide-out," said Sash, carefully filling bags while Tony shaped pieces of stiff paper. "It'd be smashing to have a place near the river."

"M'm." Tony nodded. "We might claim it, if it's any good."

"I'm looking forward to a good scrap with that bunch," said Sash. "Not worried about that, but I'm not so sure about your plan. Sounds clever stuff, mate, but it's only bluff."

"It's more than bluff. We've got Biff stone cold, and he'll know it by the time we've finished. He daren't go to the police. He daren't let on about the money because we can prove he stole it. He thinks we stole some too, but he's wrong. He thinks he's going to blackmail us into sharing, but it won't work."

"Are you really going to tell old Sam this afternoon?"

"Of course I am," said Tony. "He's got to know sooner or later, and I must tell him before we tackle Biff. And by leaving the package of

TONY AND THE SECRET MONEY

money with him, we'll not be caught with it, will we?"

"Ah yes!" Sash exclaimed. "That's the point I missed. If anything goes wrong this evening, then Biff can't shop us to the cops because any money we found we've given to the owner. That's right, ain't it?"

Tony waved two bank notes and grinned.

"Except for these two. Got to have them to put on the top and bottom of these pieces of paper. How're you doing with the bombs?"

"Quite a few to do yet. You're making a neat job of shaping the paper to bank-note size."

"Bit tricky, but nearly done. Then I'll hop off to the hospital. They said Sam was much better when I phoned on our way here." Tony eased back, patting the wad of paper into shape. "That's done it!" He fixed a bank note top and bottom, then fastened the wad with rubber bands. "Looks okay, doesn't it?"

Sash surveyed the bundle of notes. "Super! Looks like a real packet of lovely lolly!"

Tony stood up. "Right," he said briskly. "I'm off to the hospital." He fetched a small suitcase from the corner. "Phew! Fancy carrying all this cash through town!"

"Yeah!" Sash growled. "Breaks me flippin' heart, it does. All that lovely lolly for a poor old geezer. And here's me with all me beautiful

THE BUILD-UP



"Looks like a real packet of lovely lolly!"

THE BUILD-UP

young life ahead of me—and Ma and Sunny an' all! Go on, beat it before I forget I'm an honest, bird-brained nit!"

"That makes two of us." Tony chuckled. "But it's right, and you know it."

"Oh glory and rescue the flippin' perishing to you too!" Sash grinned. "You should ought to set that to music! See you back here?"

"Will do. Get some grub in. We'll need a feed before we leave."

Sash clenched his fists and flexed his arms.

"You bet! Never have a ding-dong on an empty stomach! So long, mate!"

CHAPTER 9

NOT AS PLANNED

THE ripples are reaching the end of their limit. They have spread from Tony and Sash to touch the life of Mrs Parrott who, on second thoughts, went to the police and complained of the noise Biff had made. She didn't know it was Biff, but her description of a tall, shadowy figure caused the police to believe it was.

After seeing Tony and hearing his story, Sam Betts had phoned his lawyer, and this cautious character had phoned the police. Now—all the local police, including Police-Constable True and Detective-Constable Kellogg, were searching for Biff.

They didn't know where he was and Biff didn't know the police were looking for him. Nor did Tony and Sash. And the police didn't know that Tony and Sash were closing in for a showdown with Biff.

So the three main characters—Tony, Sash and Biff—were concentrating on their own business. Biff was after large lumps of lolly. Tony and Sash were vainly hoping to keep everything

NOT AS PLANNED

quiet by bluffing, then defeating Biff in his hide-out. And the weather helped them as much as it hindered the police.

The evening was cloudy and damp. Mist swirled over the river, coiling up the banks, shrouding the landing stage and lower part of the old flour warehouse. Tony and Sash blessed the mist. The police cursed it as they stumbled and prodded their way to surround the warehouse.

They didn't see Tony and Sash slip through the mist. Tony and Sash didn't see the police. Biff, Joe, Colly and Moosh didn't bother to look out—partly because the mist made it impossible for them to see more than a few yards, and partly because there was still half an hour to go before Tony and Sash were due to arrive.

The old warehouse echoed with creaking and odd groaning noises. Biff and the three senior members of his gang were used to the noises. Biff's gang was about twenty strong, but Joe, Colly and Moosh always kept with the leader. No member came to the hide-out unless one of these four told him to attend a meeting.

Biff secretly was wondering how he could get rid of Joe, Colly and Moosh and so avoid sharing the money with them. When it came to money, Biff had no loyalties to anyone but himself. But

TONY AND THE SECRET MONEY

these three were in it with him. They'd seen the room where the money was hidden.

Right now, Biff could no more lose them than he could the nose on his face. They sat whispering together in the old tally office—a large-sized room leading off the main entrance by the landing stage. One door led into the warehouse close to a small trap-door which opened outwards.

This was the trap-door Tony had noticed on his first visit. He and Sash now crept stealthily towards it.

"There's another one like this on the other side," Tony whispered. "Reckon they both lead into the warehouse. Hold the bag while I open it."

Grass and weeds grew thickly around the small doors hinged at each side. Tony eased his fingers under the worn woodwork. The trap-door swung slowly open with scarcely a creak.

"They've oiled the hinges!" Tony whispered. "So this must be near the hide-out."

"Spooky!" Sash spoke in a hoarse whisper as a waft of damp, sour air eddied through the trap-door.

They peered inside. Spooky it was. Shafts of greyish light stabbed the cavernous gloom of the warehouse. Rustlings and squealings, faint but echoing oddly loud, reached their ears.

NOT AS PLANNED

"Rats, I guess," Tony whispered.

"And rats to you too!" Sash muttered.

Tony began to climb inside, then reached back for the case. Sash joined him. They moved a few yards further in. Tony gripped Sash's arm and pointed to a pale yellowish gleam of light under a small door.

"Bet they're in there! Waiting for us! Must've blacked out the windows."

Sash pulled Tony's head close and whispered in his ear.

"They ain't, y'know! Didn't you hear that creaking? Came from over there. We're walking into another ambush."

"Open the case and share the bombs out," Tony whispered. "We'll creep towards 'em and attack first!"

Both held a large plastic bag full of the home-made bombs, copied from young Gobbo's idea. The paper bags were nicely soggy—easy to burst on impact.

Scraping footsteps slithered over the floor. Two dark shapes emerged from the shadows.

"Ready?" Tony hissed. "Now!"

His arm swung back. A paper-covered bomb hurtled fast and true. It landed with a squelchy "shlop".

Sash let fly. Then Tony, then Sash again.

"Oof!" a voice gasped.

TONY AND THE SECRET MONEY

“!!!” another voice gasped with unprintable emphasis as the shower of blackcurrant-jam bombs landed square on target.

There was noise now. Much scuffling of feet and explosive voices. The small door was flung open. Biff stood framed in a dim glow of yellow light. He was pushed forward by Joe—Colly and Moosh crowding behind him.

Tony swung around. Sash seemed too surprised to move.

“At ’em—quick!” Tony whispered. “They haven’t seen us yet. All we’ve got. Then rush ’em!”

Throwing caution aside, Tony hurled bomb after bomb at the four close-grouped figures. Three bombs burst on one face, but he couldn’t be certain whose it was.

Then Sash went into action. His first bomb hit Biff square on the nose. Joe and Moosh tried to duck back, but Colly blocked the way. Biff stood on his own now, peering ahead with clenched fists waving.

Tony leapt forward, halted.

“Looking for me, mate?” he said quietly, then moved fast. His bunched fists slammed into his taller opponent’s midriff.

Biff’s fist caught Tony on the shoulder. Had it landed on his jaw Tony would have been knocked silly. But strangely the blow helped his

NOT AS PLANNED

next attack. It swung him slightly as he aimed for Biff's jaw. Tony's bunched knuckles connected with a force that numbed his arm.

Biff's head snapped back. His body went limp, his knees sagged. He folded quietly on to the floor. A well-aimed blow, but somewhat lucky. But it didn't change the fact that Biff was out cold.

Tony became aware of noise echoing through the warehouse, but was too busy to heed it as Moosh landed on his back and they crashed down in a flurry of arms and legs.

Sash and Joe were slogging away mightily. Slowly the harder, faster punching of Sash began to tell. And Joe, breathless and snuffling from a bleeding nose, collapsed on one knee.

"I got enough!" he gasped. "Enough, Sash!"

"Okay," Sash panted. "Seeing as we used to be schoolmates. . . ." He drew back and sprang towards Colly, fists raised, then halted.

"My eyes!" Colly was moaning. "I'm blinded!"

Sash gripped his shoulder, spun him around.

"Blackcurrant jam don't blind no one. But your flippin' dirty flour bombs could. I ought to lay you out—just for that!"

"B—B—Black. . . ." Colly began to stutter, but was interrupted by a sudden surging of

TONY AND THE SECRET MONEY

large-sized bodies all around them. "Jeeze! The cops!" Colly moaned.

Sash felt himself grabbed in muscular hands and saw three policemen separating Tony and a much-battered Moosh.

"I am a police officer," a bull-like voice roared. "Sergeant Mills is the name. Now cut it out—all of you!"

Another figure joined him. "And I am Inspector McTaggart," a Scottish voice announced. "Use your torches, you dumb clucks. Let's see what we're about."

Light from numerous torches dazzle the eyes for a few minutes. The beams flickered and waved around the assembly of policeman and boys. Several beams spotlighted two figures.

"Oh no!" Sergeant Mills exclaimed. "Not again, True, not again!"

"Jam!" said Police-Constable True, peering down at his bespattered uniform. He spoke sadly, almost tearfully. "Blurry sticky jam! Threw it at us, they did. In bags, it was. They burst! Fiendish, that's what it is—fiendish!"

A gooey, black-streaked figure appeared beside the uniformed True.

"It was in the line of duty," said Detective-Constable Kellogg. "Me and True copped the lot, as you might say." He licked his lips. "Good jam too. Shocking waste."

NOT AS PLANNED



"I am a police officer," a bull-like voice roared.

NOT AS PLANNED

"D'ye ken who threw it?" the inspector snapped.

"Who else but them?" Detective-Constable Kellogg pointed at the now-recovering Biff and his mates.

"No, we never!" Biff snarled. "Attacked, we was. Look at me and me mates! Jam all over us!"

True chortled. "Well, you always did want jam on it."

"Quiet!" Sergeant Mills roared.

Inspector McTaggart advanced upon Tony and Sash.

"I ken well enough who threw it. Would ye no have a tongue in your heads, laddies?"

"Flippin' cops!" Sash snarled. "Spoiled everything, you have!"

"I'll say you have!" said Tony, angry at this interference in his carefully worked-out plans. "What's the big idea—barging in on a private fight? Weren't breaking any laws, were we?"

Sergeant Mills passed a package to Inspector McTaggart and whispered something.

"Well, well!" said the inspector softly. "So we weren't breaking any laws, were we not?" He waved the package of papers gently to and fro in front of Tony's face. "Money, laddie! Your money?"

"No."

TONY AND THE SECRET MONEY

"Found near a case and a couple of plastic bags containing some jammy bombs. You still say it's not yours?"

"It's not even money, you Scotch nit!" Sash raved.

"What a rude laddie," the inspector murmured. "If he speaks again without being asked, you have my permission to belt him a couple on the backside, Sergeant." He flipped the package through his fingers, then grinned at Tony. "Och, now, there's a trick to play! Who were you going to fool?"

Biff now saw that the package was made up of plain paper with only one bank note top and bottom.

"You dirty double-crosser!" he yelled at Tony. "You were going to trick me! I'll make you pay for this. Hey, Inspector! Better arrest those two. They've swiped fahsands from old Sam Betts's house!"

"Have they now? And you were being given these?"

"Yes, that's right."

"But you had some of this money, didn't you?"

"Who, me?" Biff was wide-eyed innocence.

"You 'eard," Sergeant Mills growled. "And what's more, you bought some stuff at Marks's shop this afternoon, didn't you?"

NOT AS PLANNED

"Oh, well—yes, I did have a fiver," Biff admitted. "But he owed it me, see?"

"I'm sure he did," said the inspector. "And made it himself, no doubt."

"Made it himself? What. . . ."

The sergeant nodded. "You catch on quick, chum. That note was a forgery and *you* passed it."

"Which is a criminal offence," said Inspector McTaggart. "And if we find any more here, then you and your friends are in possession of forged money. It is possible you may have stolen it. In other words, laddie—you're in dead trouble. Away to the station with them!"

Joe, Colly and Moosh started raving and struggling.

Tony and Sash stood dumbfounded. All their careful plans shot to pieces. And now the terrible news that the secret money was forged.

"We've heard from Sam Betts's lawyer," Inspector McTaggart told Tony and Sash. "You've been a pair of well-meaning laddies, but—och! The trouble you've caused! But I'll not be hard on you. I want to see you both at Sam Betts's house at ten tomorrow morning. Is that understood?"

Tony gulped. Sash looked bewildered.

"Yes, sir," said Tony.

"Then scoot!"

TONY AND THE SECRET MONEY

They scooted. There wasn't really much else they could do.

They arrived home, and each in his own way spent a most difficult evening. Sometimes grown-ups ask more questions than flippin' kids, don't they?

CHAPTER 10

WHERE THERE'S A WILL

THERE are good days and bad days. Go to sleep at night and think—tomorrow is going to be a good day. That's great! We all get them—the good and the bad. But tomorrow is no fun when you know it's going to be bad. Which sometimes shows just how wrong you can be. Like Tony and Sash, who ambled miserably to Sam Betts's house next morning.

"Flippin' forgeries! Duds! Bad 'uns! Stinkers! Not lovely lolly at all!" Sash fumed. "Honest, mate, I'm that furious I could spit red-hot coals!"

"Aw, shut up moaning!" Tony retorted. "D'you think I don't feel the same? No good yacking on about it."

"It's in me nature. Yacking on, I mean. Like Ma did last night."

Tony sighed. "Me too! Even Dad kept on and on."

They turned the corner into Sam's street and halted, wide-eyed.

A crowd of people surged over the roadway. Radio and TV Outside Broadcast vans stood in

TONY AND THE SECRET MONEY

front of Sam's house—their cables trailing through the windows. Two police cars were parked outside Mrs Parrott's. Policemen stood around.

Police-Constable True spotted them.

"Come on, you two!" he yelled. "Inspector McTaggart is waiting on you!" He grabbed the boys and steered them through the crowd and into the house.

Sam Betts said: "Bless you, my bonny lads! This is some home-coming! All spick and span too. Reckon you and the police are proper magicians."

"Is this them, Pop?" a camera-loaded man asked.

"Sure it is," said Sam. "These are my friends—Tony and Sash. Loyal friends too, as well as kind."

Flashlamps sizzled flaringly. Cameras clicked. Inspector McTaggart thrust his way past the photographers.

"Later, laddies, later!" he ordered. "You'll have your stories and pictures later." He nudged Tony and Sash. "Upstairs with you."

A policeman guarded the stairway. Men in overalls were working in the back room. Two walls were already re-plastered.

"Cor! What's happened?" Sash gasped.

Tony grinned. "Looks like the police have

WHERE THERE'S A WILL

stripped the whole room, and now they're making it like new again."

"That's it," said the inspector. "My men have been working all night." He glared at the boys. "You could have saved us a heap of work," he said sternly. Then after a pause he smiled. "But I'll no say I wouldna have done the same. You weren't to know it was forged money."

"Beats me," said Tony. "Why hide it like this?"

"He had to."

"Who—Paul?" Sash asked.

"Yes, Paul. But the police know him as Peter Holwitz. He was Mrs Betts's brother. Not even Sam knew that. Holwitz blackmailed her so she had to let him stay here. He was one of the cleverest forgers in Europe. We almost caught him when he was in this country. Forged money isn't easy to get rid of in a hurry, and he didn't want to destroy it so he pasted it behind the wallpaper, then skipped out."

"Where is he now?" Tony asked.

"Dead. Killed in a road smash in France last year. We've got his will."

"What people leave when they die—saying who's to get their lolly?" said Sash. "That sort of will?"

"That's right."

"How did you get it?" said Tony.

TONY AND THE SECRET MONEY

Inspector McTaggart pointed to the two walls the boys hadn't stripped.

"Behind the paper on those walls, together with over five thousand pounds of real money. The will said he left everything to his sister. But she died, and her will left everything to Sam."

"Coo!" Sash's eyes gleamed. "So Sam's got lots of lolly after all?"

"He certainly has—thanks to you," said McTaggart.

"Cor lumme! What a turn-up!" Sash exclaimed.

"I'm glad for Sam." Then Tony chuckled. "Poor old Biff! Pity he didn't try stripping these walls!"

"That laddie has tried his best to make trouble for you, but we'll no let him," said the Inspector. "And now, before you go downstairs—Sam has asked me to tell you that he's giving you ten percent reward money. Just like insurance companies do when they recover lost valuables."

"Ten what-er?" Sash queried.

"A share of lolly, you dope!" said Tony, then worked out some quick arithmetic in his head. "Yeow!" he yelled. "Ten percent of five thousand is five hundred pounds!" He gripped Sash's shoulders and shook him until Sash's

WHERE THERE'S A WILL

eyes popped. "Two hundred and fifty quid each, Sash. Hear that? Holidays and clothes and lashings of grub—and your Ma and Sunny—and. . . ."

Sash stood still, eyes wide, mouth open as Tony dropped his hands.

"Cor, stone the flippin' crows!" Sash gasped. "I feel sick. Sick, I feel, and no mistake!"

"You'll no feel sick for long," said the inspector. "Away downstairs with you to thank old Sam for remembering your kindness so generously." He reached out and grabbed them as they turned to go. "Och, but you're a sad-looking pair! Have ye no had a wash the morn? Away to the bathroom and slicken yourselves up for the camera boys, for 'tis news ye are—though heaven knows why!"

"Aw, for Pete's sake!" Tony protested. "We had a wash last night!"

"Well, *really*!" Sash spoke in a high-pitched, posh-sounding voice. "How common can you get? Us millionaires has to set an example, doncherknow!" Then in his normal voice: "Come on, mate! For two hundred and fifty quid I'd wash me four times a day!"

Tony shrugged. "They say money changes people. You're not the Sash I used to know." He shrugged again. "Oh well, if you can take it—I can."

TONY AND THE SECRET MONEY

"Cheer up," said Sash. "It's going to be a good day after all."

"You bet!" said Tony. "Yes, by golly, you bet it is!"

And it was.



